

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7731

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USNMR SHAPE FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, PFOR, NL

SUBJECT: DUTCH DEFENSE REDUCTIONS

1. SUMMARY: THERE EXISTS A REAL POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER DUTCH DEFENSE REDUCTIONS. EVEN IF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE (MOD) ESCAPES HAVING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CURRENT GON EFFORT TO CUT GROWTH IN COLLECTIVE SECTOR DOWN TO ONE PERCENT A YEAR, FURTHER CUTS THIS SUMMER ARE LIKELY. END SUMMARY.

2. DEFENSE MINISTER VREDELING AND HIS TWO STATE SECRETARIES, STEMERDINK (MATERIEL) AND VAN LENT (PERSONNEL), ARE REPORTEDLY OPPOSED EVEN TO CONSIDERING ANY FURTHER DEFENSE ECONOMIES AT THIS TIME. VREDELING IS SAID TO BE BANKING ON THE EXPECTATION THAT FINANCE MINISTER DUISENBERG CAN BE PERSUADED TO SPARE DEFENSE-- AT LEAST IN THIS ROUND--ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE MINISTRY HAS ALREADY ADJUSTED DOWNWARD LAST FALL.

3. THESE EXPECTATIONS MAY NOT BE REALISTIC. WITH PERSONNEL COSTS AT A HIGH LEVEL, THE GON IS FEELING THE INCREASINGLY SEVERE FINANCIAL BITE OF ITS POLICY NOT TO REDUCE GROUND FORCES EXCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF AN MBFR AGREEMENT. SINCE PERSONNEL
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COSTS NOW TAKE APPROXIMATELY 65 PERCENT OF THE DEFENSE BUDGET,

THERE ARE LIMITED RESOURCES FOR NEW EQUIPMENT. RECENT DECISIONS TO CONSTRUCT EIGHT NEW FRIGATES FOR THE NAVY AND TO PURCHASE 84 F-16'S FOR THE AIR FORCE (WITH AN OPTION TO BUY 18 MORE) LEAVE LITTLE FOR SUCH PROJECTS AS REPLACEMENT OF THE OLD P-2 ASW AIR-CRAFT AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES. SOME PROGRAMS WILL HAVE TO GO.

4. ACCORDING TO MFA SOURCES, THE MOD STILL HAS TO ABSORB, EX POST FACTO AND IN ADDITION TO ANY CUTS RESULTING FROM THE CURRENT ONE-PERCENT ROUND, REDUCTIONS OF ABOUT \$18.5 MILLION WHICH WERE DECIDED UPON LAST SPRING AND A FURTHER \$85 MILLION FOR 1976.

5. IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE ISSUE OF DEFENSE AND OTHER REDUCTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT ONE-PERCENT ROUND WILL REACH THE CABINET LATE MARCH OR EARLY APRIL. DEFENSE IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN TO ESCAPE BEING INCLUDED. VREDELING MAY, DESPITE HIS INCLINATIONS, NOT BE ABLE TO RESIST PRESSURES FROM HIS SOCIALIST COLLEAGUES. BEYOND THAT, DECISIONS ON FURTHER DEFENSE REDUCTIONS ARE LIKELY TO COME UP FOR DECISION EARLY THIS SUMMER, AS THE CABINET GEARS UP FOR THE SEPTEMBER OPENING OF PARLIAMENT.
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